

Board of Selectmen's Meeting Minutes
November 1, 2010
Harpswell Town Office
Approved on November 18, 2010

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Selectmen Present: James S. Henderson, Mark E. Wallace and Elinor Multer

Staff Present: Kristi Eiane, Town Administrator; Terri Sawyer, Deputy Town Administrator

Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance: The meeting was called to order at 6:30 PM.

The meeting was videotaped and broadcast live on Harpswell Community Television.

1. Adoption of the Agenda: Chairman Henderson moved, seconded by Selectman Multer to adopt the agenda as printed; motion passed 3-0.

2. West Harpswell School Closure Report: Administrator Eiane provided a progress report on the School Closure Cost Review Team's (SCCRT) work (attached) and stated the Team will be meeting tomorrow to prepare comments for the Board. Robert McIntyre stated some of his concerns with inconsistencies in the Lack of Need Report and the Cost Detail (attached). Selectman Multer expressed dissatisfaction with Mr. McIntyre's implied accusation that MSAD 75 has not been forthcoming. Leon Ogrodnik asked if the SCCRT has looked at the principal cost situation from last year and of seeking a refund. Administrator Eiane responded it was not the Team's charge and would be up to the Board of Selectmen. Signe Daniels read a letter submitted to the District last year from the parents of West Harpswell School students requesting the District consider other alternatives to closure. Joanne Rogers, MSAD 75 School Board Director, stated that Harpswell Islands School has 12 classrooms, equivalent to Bowdoin and Bowdoinham, and can accommodate the additional students and at appropriate student/teacher ratios. Anne Standridge stated that enrollment trends may be declining right now but suggested they may increase given the affordable housing project and the Town's low tax rate. In her opinion, Ms. Standridge believes that long range planning should be based on the two schools and if West Harpswell School is closed now – it is a permanent action. Kay Ogrodnik noted the School Board's vote to close the school this year came only 3 months after the Town voted to keep it open. Ms. Ogrodnik commented on Harpswell's MSAD 75 assessment and noted that if West Harpswell School is closed as a savings to the District, the Town will still pay a large assessment. Bill Heaphy stated the Closure Report is based on false economy and if the two schools merge, there will be a low margin for an increase in enrollment before Harpswell Islands School will need to be expanded. Barbara White attended the open house at Hamilton Place and believes there are 10 homes sold which indicates the population is changing. Selectman Henderson interjected that he had recently been at the Hamilton Place open house and spoke with the Housing Authority representative. Henderson said that he recalls that five of the fifteen lots have been sold and four homes have been built to date, with a fifth scheduled for completion in early 2011. Kara Douglas expressed a concern about a paragraph in the Lack of Need Report that seems to indicate that WHS students' needs regarding positive role models are not being met and they are. Ms. Douglas stated she wished she could see what documentation the District used when referencing educational theory and practices. Mr. McIntyre questioned some costs (e.g. average instead of actual and asbestos costs when WHS doesn't have any). Mr. McIntyre stated that Commissioner Gendron promised a refund if the principal calculation was discovered to be incorrect in the first 2008-2009 base year closure report. Selectman Multer insisted Mr. McIntyre cease accusing the District of being dishonest and using such accusatory phrases. Hannah Beatty stated it is getting more and more difficult to see WHS kept open with the many changes the District has made (e.g. changing the art teacher) that in her opinion, are not in the best interest of the students. Ms. Beatty does want WHS to remain open and wishes the Town had more oversight of its operations. School Board member Joanne Rogers responded teachers are placed where needed within the District based on a number of factors, including the number of students and the percent of teacher needed. Mr. Ogrodnik stated that when he hears Ms. Beatty describe the unsettling affect of this yearly closure review on her and her family, he sees it as the District using intimidation. Chairman Henderson stated those type comments are not constructive. Selectman Multer insisted the language stop as the Board has a Public Participation Policy that prohibits insulting others. Elizabeth Davis stated she doesn't

question the District trying to serve the needs of all the District children; she does question, whether they are all being served. Ms. Davis suggested this situation requires thinking outside the box and perhaps Harpswell could educate its children independently without the District. Signe Daniels stated enrollment figures are fluctuating but not dramatically (WHS 82 to 68). Kara Douglas questioned whether the costs to maintain the building (if voted to close) should be part of the closure report. Chairman Henderson reminded the public the Board created an Education Advisory Committee and is seeking members. Bill Heaphy suggested the paragraph referencing “very small grades” in the Lack of Need Report should be eliminated. Kay Ogrodnik stated that most of the remaining buildable land in Harpswell is located on the Neck side. Ms. Ogrodnik expressed concern about speakers not being able to fully express themselves. Chairman Henderson stated there is a fine line between expression and accusation and stated the Board needs to focus on Town business and submitting comments to the Commissioner. Carmen Heatherington stated that the Harpswell nursery school has a waiting list of 13 children, indicating that young children figures are increasing. Alison Hawkes stated she doesn’t believe there have been any malicious actions on the District’s part and the declining enrollment figures are occurring at both schools; the Harpswell Islands School is physically able to house all the students. Richard Moseley stated it seems like money is coming ahead of education, which should be most important.

3. Other Business: None.

4. Adjournment: The meeting adjourned by unanimous vote at 7:50 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Terri-Lynn Sawyer

Attachments: School Closure Cost Review Team Status Report
Robert McIntyre November 1 comments

[Attachments are available at the Town Clerk’s Office or by email at harpswell@town.harpswell.me.us]